

Alcohol Combinations

Risks associated with drinking alcohol can be multiplied when drinking is combined with gambling or with other drugs. Some of the substances described in this resource present a minimal or negligible health risk when combined with moderate drinking; however, this resource also reviews the more harmful effects of certain combinations of alcohol and other drugs and activities.



Alcohol and Gambling

It is well known that people often drink while gambling. It is also known that excessive forms of both commonly co-exist. Among those who drink excessively, there is a higher proportion of people who are probable pathological gamblers than there is in the general population. Conversely, potential pathological gamblers and those who are at low or moderate risk for developing a gambling problem are more likely than other gamblers to drink problematically and possibly have an alcohol dependency.

Alcohol and Commonly Used Drugs



Caffeine

Caffeine slightly reduces the effects of inebriation but has no effect on blood alcohol concentration. Caffeinated alcoholic beverages (CABs) have long been available in the form of coffee-based cocktails. More recently, energy drinks have been used as mixers. Young people are the biggest consumers of energy drinks. Young adults who drink CABs are more likely to drink more than those who drink non-caffeinated alcohol. This is both because they stay awake longer and have more time to drink and because they may not realize they are intoxicated. They are also more likely to drive while under the influence of alcohol or be the passenger of such a driver, suffer injuries requiring medical attention or be involved in a sexual assault, as victim or assailant. Both alcohol and caffeine are dehydrating. Dehydration causes thirst, which may lead to drinking more alcohol, which again increases dehydration.





Tobacco

Studies show that people who drink also tend to smoke and vice versa. The pharmacological relationship between alcohol and tobacco is mediated by circumstantial factors. Many social or weekend smokers strongly crave a cigarette when drinking excessively. People who quit smoking often start up again during a night of drinking.



Cannabis

Cannabis and alcohol taken together induce a sedative effect. Judgment, reaction time and coordination can be affected, making driving or operating mechanical equipment particularly risky. Using both substances can make the individual drink beyond their tolerance and therefore be more likely to experience alcohol poisoning.

Cannabis has an [anti-emetic effect](#) for many people, meaning that it makes it more difficult for the body to vomit. By inhibiting the body's instinct to vomit, cannabis can increase the danger of alcohol poisoning.

Alcohol and Medications

Some medications, particularly over-the-counter products like painkillers, hinder elimination of alcohol, increase or mask its effects, or cause unpredictable reactions. Conversely, alcohol can make medications less effective or interfere with their elimination. Both alcohol and medications are eliminated by the liver; thus, as a general rule, it is best not to drink while taking medication.

Anyone taking medication should be properly informed about contraindications before drinking alcohol. To find information about contraindications, check packages or speak with a doctor or pharmacist.

Alcohol and Illegal Drugs

Cocaine

The stimulant effects of cocaine send alcohol to the brain more quickly, causing greater intoxication than drinking the same amount of alcohol alone. As with caffeine, cocaine keeps people awake, thus providing more time for drinking. All of the risks associated with alcohol are thus increased, including dependence. Other stimulants, such as the amphetamines, are likely to produce similar effects in combination with alcohol.

Opioids and Other Depressants

Alcohol is a depressant drug, so combining it with other depressants like sedatives or opioids (e.g., heroin, oxycodone) can be deadly. Risk of overdose is multiplied, as the nervous system is slowed by the combined action of the drugs, which may cause confusion, loss of consciousness and death.

"Party" Drugs

Mixing alcohol with party drugs like ecstasy (MDMA), gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB) and ketamine is common among some groups of young people at dance parties and nightclubs. At the very least, mixing alcohol and these drugs impairs your ability to make decisions and can mean you are more likely to be injured or to injure others. At worst, the depressant GHB in particular can cause coma and death when combined with alcohol.

Conclusion

Caution is called for when combining alcohol with caffeine or gambling. When using tobacco and other drugs, alcohol is clearly contraindicated. Alcohol should never be combined with other sedatives. Anyone using medications should check the package or ask their pharmacist about contraindications before using alcohol.

For More Information

Alberta Health Services offers a wide range of addiction and mental health services. For individuals looking for help for themselves or for someone they care about, the addiction line is available 24 hours a day.

Addiction Helpline: 1-866-332-2322

For more detailed information on this topic and for other related information, go to the [Alcohol and Health Series](#) at albertahealthservices.ca